THE MINISTER OF TOURISM (MUFTI MOHD. SAYEED) : (a) and (b) There is no proposal at this stage under the consideration of this Ministry for conducting Package Tours for people from weaker sections of the society. However, India Tourism Development Corporation runs a number of Package Tours during certain months of the year for students, youth, senior citizens and persons travelling on Leave Travel Concessions.

Hotel Brahmaputra

2692. SHRIMATI BIJOYA CHAKRAVARTY : Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state :

(a) by when the Hotel Brahmaputra in Guwahati will be commissioned;

(b) whether there is any proposal for upgrading the Hotel Brahmaputra from three-star to five-star status;

(c) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to set up an institute of catering technology and hotel management to be run by ITDC in the Hotel Brahamputra for the benefit of the students of the North Eastern region opting for hotel as their career; and

(d) if so, by when the institute is likely to be set up ?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM (MUFTI MOHD. SAYEED) : a) Hotel Brahmaputra Ashok being jointly constructed by ITDC and the Government of Assam is expected to be commissioned very soon.

(b) and (c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

Lifting of ban on the entry of foreign tourists into Assam

2693. SHRIMATI BIJOYA CHAKRAVARTY : Will the Minister of TOURISM be pleased to state :

(a) whether there is any proposal under Government's consideration to lift the ban on the entry of foreign tourists into Assam; and

(b) if not, whether Government propose to arrange package tours for foreign tourists willing to visit the tourist spots in Assam ?

THE MINISTER OF TOURISM (MUFTI MOHD. SAYEED) : (a) and (b) Foreign tourists travelling in groups on tours organised by Indian travel agencies approved by the Government of India are already permitted to visit Kaziranga National Park in Assam for a maximum period of 7 days subject to certain conditions.

Setting up of new Passport Offices

2694. SHRI TALARI MANOHAR :
SHRI PRABHAKAR RAO KALVALA :

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) what is the criterion followed for setting up Passport offices in the country;

(b) whether it is a fact that Government have closed down its Passport Office at Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh;

(c) if so, what are the reasons therefor;

(d) whether Government propose to open Passport Offices at Nalgonda and Mahaboobnagar in Andhra Pradesh; or any other places in the country; and

(e) if so, what are the details in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH) : (a) The basic criterion followed by the Government in setting up Passport Offices is to have one Passport Office in each state, subject to its justification on the basis of number of passport applications. A second passport office was opened in some States where the passport applications from different parts of those States exceeded 1 lakh per annum. However, this latter criterion is being reviewed in the light of the Govt. decision to computerize the main 16 passport offices in India.

(b) Yes, Sir.

(c) The Passport Office, Vijayawada was opened on 8-10-1984. The average receipt of passport applications during its last 18 months worked out to an average of 1,187 applications per month. This was